

CHAPTER V

THE SPIRITUAL FELLOWSHIP

" Amore non è altro che unimento spirituale dell' anima a della cosa amata "—Dante, *Convivio*, III. X.

" Id quod amatur amore amicitiae, simpliciter et per se amatur."—St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II Q. 26. A. 4.

CATHERINE was now nearly twenty-four years old : a wonderfully endowed woman. Gifts had been 'given her to fulfil the impassioned hunger and thirst after righteousness ; a divination of spirits, and an intuition so swift and infallible that men deemed it miraculous, the magic of a personality so winning and irresistible that neither man nor woman could hold out against it, a simple untaught wisdom that confounded the arts and subtleties of the world; and, with these, a speech so golden, so full of a mystical eloquence, that her words, whether written or spoken, made all hearts burn within them when her message came. In ecstatic contemplation she passes into regions beyond sense and above reason, voyaging alone in unexplored and untrodden realms of the spirit; but, when the sounds of the earth again break in upon her trance, a homely common-sense and simple humour are hers, no less than the knowledge acquired in these communings with an unseen world.

It is stated by Orlando Malavolti, the sixteenth century historian of Siena, that Catherine had already written to Pope Urban V. But this is manifestly an error. Her time had not yet come to pass out of her hidden life into what a Pope of the Renaissance was to call the " game of the world." It is curious that, while she makes one reference to Urban in a letter to his successor,¹ she never mentions the hopes and fears that had been raised by his coming. Her entry into public affairs appears to have begun in those months that intervened between his flight from Italy and his death at Avignon.

All through this summer of 1370, the soul of Catherine was ¹ Letter 231 (7),